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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 003231

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SUBJECT: PRT KIRKUK: IFTAR CELEBRATIONS REFLECT BOTH
OPTIMISM AND SKEPTICISM ABOUT ELECTION LAW PASSAGE

REF: BAGHDAD 3082

Classified By: Classified by PRT Leader Howard Keegan; reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

This is a Kirkuk PRT reporting cable.

¶1. (C) Summary: At a 25 September PRT-hosted iftar that brought together community leaders from all ethnicities in Kirkuk Province, attendees had the opportunity to socialize and to share views on the just-passed provincial election law. The overall tone was optimistic. Arabs were most positive, followed closely by the Turkomen with the Kurds superficially positive but cautious. Even Kurdish leaders recognized a new phase of negotiations had begun. No one set down unhelpful demands or redlines, a change from previous discussions with PRT members on the same topic. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) PRT hosted an iftar September 25, and conversation among Kurdish, Arab, and Turkomen participants focused on the just-passed Provincial Elections Law. The collective Arab reaction is that Article 24 of the new law responds to enough of their demands to meet the community's needs. They gave up the external enforcement mechanism of the original Article 24's paragraph 7, but believe the compromise law ensures Kirkuk's future remains for the Council of Representatives (COR) to decide. If the COR fails, Arabs are comfortable that the "three presidencies" (a reference to the Presidency Council), will develop a solution for Kirkuk along with the UN. Kirkuki Arabs also are pleased that the COR committee will examine allegations the Kurds attempted to forcibly changed Kirkuk's demography since 2003 and that it will require a full review of voter registries. Arabs say they are prepared to support the work of the committee at the local level. The leader of the emergent Arab Unity Party, Abu Saddam, seemed more moderate than even two days before, acknowledging "we accept we cannot get everything" and that Article 24 is a "good compromise and the Arabs are getting important things."

¶3. (SBU) Formerly disorganized Arab political community leaders appear to have been planning for this moment for some time. The Arab Unity Bloc (AUB) has already formed subcommittees covering agricultural land issues, identification card registration review, and "trespassers" (i.e., residents brought in to Kirkuk to change the province's demography) to facilitate the work of the Article 24 Committee. Both the Kurds and Turkomen appear to be one step behind in the process before it has even begun.

¶4. (SBU) The Turkomen had sought non-Kurdish (Shi'a majority, if possible) Iraqi Army troops from the south to take over provincial security, to facilitate greater and more open Turkomen participation in Kirkuk's political life. While Turkomen contacts said that the approved Article 24 didn't give them all they wanted, they still regard it as positive for their community. Turkomen leaders told us they are going to help the committee by providing it with

documents and information about jinsiya registration cards to help validate voter registration lists.

¶5. (SBU) Kurdish reactions, from both PUK/KDP and politically independent Kurds, varied. Several KDP members indicated they will insist that territorial claims under Article 140 be addressed, including land tenure decisions and forcible changes to Kirkuk's demography directed against Kurds since 1968. They alleged past destruction of 772 Kurdish villages and said the Article 24 Commission must deal with this to be valid. PUK members spoke more moderately, reflecting involvement by party members in developing and approving the compromise Article 24. Independent Kurds were fairly skeptical, criticizing the performance of the two major Kurdish parties and questioning their dedication to the Kurdish people. Some seemed to question whether KDP and PUK helped to postpone the Provincial Elections Law for their own political interests.

¶6. (C) Comment: While Kirkuki public reaction to the Provincial Elections Law has been generally positive, there are differences in perception among Kirkuk's ethnic communities regarding their relative success in the negotiations and necessary next steps. Arabs are satisfied and committed to working within the Article 24 framework. The Turkomen are somewhat more skeptical of making additional political gains, but support the process. Kurdish views are varied. While the PUK seems ready to engage, KDP leaders may take a harder approach that could degrade the Committee's probability of success. Nevertheless, each of Kirkuk's ethnic communities seem to think they succeeded in protecting enough of their fundamental interests to avoid walking away,

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although they appreciate that they did so in part through some creative ambiguity. End comment.

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